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ABSTRACT

This study investigated the student perspective on nonprofit management education. Students in six nonprofit management graduate and certificate programs affiliated with the Building Bridges Initiative were surveyed, and 256 responses were received (50% response rate). This group of students was distinguished by the fact that most were employed full-time, employed in the nonprofit sector. Also, 71% were seeking a program within a 1-hour drive. The race and ethnicity of these students (80% white/Caucasian, 16% students of color) closely matched the employment composition of the nonprofit sector. Students were continuing their education mostly for personal development and skill acquisition than for increased income. About 50% received some type of financial support from their employer and 44% received time off for educational purposes. Course topics that focus on internal operations unique to the nonprofit sector were viewed as being the most important for managing and leading nonprofit organizations. Most students were satisfied with their educational programs, although students did note room for improvement, especially in the development and strengthening of linkages with the nonprofit sector. (Contains 5 tables and 12 references.) (SLD)

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Building Bridges Initiative Cluster Evaluation:

Survey of Nonprofit Management Students

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Executive Summary

"Users" or students have much to tell us about the desired outcomes associated with the Building Bridges Initiative (BBI). They also have much to tell the field about their needs and expectations of nonprofit management education. This study provides the student or "demand" perspective to a more documented and researched "supply" perspective of nonprofit management education.

We surveyed students enrolled in six nonprofit management graduate and certificate programs affiliated with BBI grantee institutions. We received 256 surveys for a 50% response rate. We found that:

- The characteristic that distinguishes this group of students is that they are *working* students – most are employed full-time and most are employed in the nonprofit sector.

- Students are "place-bound" with most, 71%, seeking a program within a one-hour drive.

- Students' race and ethnicity (80% white/Caucasian, 16% students of color) closely match the employment composition of the nonprofit sector.

- Students continue their education primarily for personal development and skill acquisition and less so to increase their income.

- Of the students employed while attending classes, 50% received some type of financial support from their employer and 44% received time-off for educational purposes.

- Students choose programs because of the program's focus/specialization in nonprofits and the program's reputation. Students are also attracted to the linkages of the program with the nonprofit sector.

- Course topics that focus on internal operations unique to the nonprofit sector, such as fundraising and development, strategic planning for nonprofits, and governance, were viewed as being most important for managing and leading nonprofit organizations.

- Most students are satisfied with their educational programs, though there is room for improvement, especially in the development and strengthening of linkages of the program with the nonprofit sector.

Introduction

The W. K. Kellogg Foundation's Building Bridges Initiative is a five-year effort to help develop more comprehensive educational programs that respond to the wide range of management and leadership needs of Third Sector leaders. The initiative includes 19 grantees in the United States and 8 sites in Latin America. The Building Bridges Initiative aims to improve the quality of life in communities through the better management and leadership of the nonprofit organizations that serve these communities. Nonprofit management education is a fundamental vehicle to enhance management and leadership skills. Nonprofit management program development is of increasing analytical interest, and the Building Bridges Initiative and its cluster evaluation provides a view of the "users" or the demand side of nonprofit management education programs.

To date, research and evaluations of nonprofit management programs focus primarily on the supply side of academia – the number of courses being offered (Wish and Mirabella, 1998a, 1998b; Mirabella and Wish, 2000) and the organization and management of the centers or programs that offer these courses (i.e., Larson and Long, 1998, 2000; O'Neill, Young, and McAdam, 1988; O'Neill and Fletcher, 1998). "Users" or students have much to tell us about desired outcomes associated with the Building Bridges Initiative (BBI). For example, students can provide information about the relevance of curricular offerings, the accessibility of programs, and the ways that programs bridge theory and practice in- and out-of the classroom. This report provides the student perspective on the education and career goals of the future leaders and managers of the nonprofit sector.

After a brief discussion of previous studies and reports of nonprofit management education, this paper focuses on the findings of a survey of students enrolled in nonprofit management education programs funded through the BBI. We begin by discussing the design of the survey and data collection. We then present the findings of the study starting with a profile of students. Next, we discuss why students chose to continue their education and why they chose nonprofit management programs. We then discuss students' perspectives of the topics of greatest importance for leading and managing nonprofit organizations. We follow this with a discussion of students' satisfaction with their programs and summarize our findings in the conclusion.

Nonprofit Management Education

The nonprofit sector can be traced back centuries, but the profession of nonprofit manager, as defined in a credentialed program, is traced by Michael O'Neill (1998) to a certificate program launched by Columbia University's Institute for Not-for-Profit Management in 1977 and the nonprofit concentration in the MPA program at University of Missouri at Kansas City in 1981. Today, there are 91 graduate degree programs in the United States that have three or more courses in nonprofit management (Mirabella and Wish, 2000). This is a fraction of the 767 academic institutions that offer master's degrees in business and 347 institutions offering graduate programs in public administration (Digest of Education Statistics, 1999), but the number of nonprofit programs and degrees continues to grow.

The structure of graduate nonprofit management education continues to evolve. Programs are found in dedicated nonprofit programs and as components of MPA, MBA, and MSW degrees. The *Guidelines for Graduate Professional Education in Nonprofit Organizations, Management and Leadership* (*Guidelines*) prepared in 2000 by a task group from the Nonprofit Academic Centers Council (NACC) and the National Association of Schools of Public Affairs and Administration (NASPAA) suggest that programs should meet these requirements:

- A Masters degree in Nonprofit Organizations (MNO) or Management (MNM) should include a minimum of 36 semester hours.

- A Masters in Public Administration or Affairs (MPA) with a Concentration in Nonprofit Management should include a minimum of 36 semester hours with a minimum of 12 semester hours focusing primarily on the unique essential elements of the nonprofit sector.

- A Graduate Certificate in Nonprofit Management should have a minimum of 12 semester hours of MNO courses.

The *Guidelines* also suggest that programs address two types of courses: those unique to the nonprofit sector and those of importance but not unique to the sector. Unique topics include the history, values, ethics and philosophies of nonprofits, their legal structure, revenue sources, and governance. Important, general topics include budgeting, organizational theory, and quantitative analysis. While not suggesting what the content of a program should be, Wish and Mirabella (1998a, 1998b) and Mirabella and Wish (2000) have classified the course topics of current nonprofit programs. They found that nonprofit programs focus mainly on courses about internal organization functions versus externally focused topics (e.g., international issues, relationships between the sectors).

These efforts help to describe the curriculum of nonprofit management programs and may be thought of as an essential early step to the creation of a unique academic field. One of the goals of our student study is to add a student perspective to this discussion.

The Building Bridges Initiative Survey of Nonprofit Management Students

We surveyed students enrolled in six nonprofit management graduate and certificate programs at these BBI grantee institutions: Case Western Reserve University, George Mason University, Indiana University (IUPUI), Portland State University, SUNY-Albany, and Western Michigan University. Students enrolled in Spring/Fall 1999 and/or Spring 2000 nonprofit management courses at the six institutions were invited to complete the survey.

We limited our study to students in graduate and certificate programs at these six institutions for several reasons. First, some of the BBI grantees were just starting to offer degree programs and did not have students enrolled in programs during Spring 1999. Second, we did not include undergraduate programs as our focus was on returning students, and because American Humanics, an undergraduate nonprofit management certification program, conducts its own evaluations. Third, we did not include The Learning Institute because of the unique nature of their program – distance learning. A separate study of their students is under discussion. Thus, the six institutions we chose offer the more traditional and/or established graduate degree and certificate programs found among the 19 BBI institutions.

To maintain research integrity and preserve student confidentiality, a number of procedures were implemented. First, the survey instrument was reviewed and approved by the University Committee on Research Involving Human Subjects at Michigan State University (MSU). Respondents were provided a contact at MSU if they had any concerns or questions (none were received). Second, to meet confidentiality guidelines established at other universities, we sent participating institutions the surveys in sealed and stamped envelopes and the university then addressed and mailed them. A similar procedure was employed to send reminder postcards to students.

The survey was conducted during Spring and Summer 2000 so that most respondents had at least one academic semester exposure to nonprofit management programs. We mailed 520 surveys, ten were undeliverable, and 256 useable surveys were returned to us for a response rate of 50%. Data were analyzed using SPSS. Percentages and means were calculated for each item on

the survey. Spearman correlation was used to determine correlations significant at $\leq .05$ with a coefficient $\geq .20$.

We designed the student survey to serve the cluster evaluation needs of the BBI and used prior research and studies in the construction of the instrument. Human capital theory offered insights into the economic issues associated with additional schooling and suggested questions about cost, access, reasons for further study, and perceptions about the comparative standing of nonprofit, government, and for-profit management programs. Young (1983) led us to consider the self-selection elements of nonprofit management and questions about students' attraction to work in the sector. Wish and Mirabella (1998a and 1998b) provided insights into the program features that influence student decision-making and the Nonprofit Academic Centers Council's identification of core courses assisted us in identifying a set of core management competencies often associated with nonprofit management programs.

The remainder of this paper presents the findings from this survey.

Profile of Students

We begin our discussion of survey findings with a description of the respondents. While any academic program administrator can describe characteristics of the students attending his or her program, there is little, if any, demographic data of nonprofit management students aggregated across multiple institutions. Although these data are not representative of all nonprofit management students and, therefore, should not be generalized to all students, they present a snap shot of nonprofit management students not available elsewhere.

We asked students their sex, age, race, educational background, and about their current and past employment and about their academic program. Our findings show the following:

- **Sex:** Survey respondents were significantly more likely to be female (80%) than male (20%).

- **Age:** Students spanned all age groups, from early 20s (3%) to 60 and older (1%). Students' ages were distributed somewhat equally across three age categories: Early career students (37% between 19-29), mid-career students (31% between 30-39 years of age), and later-career students (32% age 40 and older).

- **Race/Ethnic Group:** Respondents were predominantly white/Caucasian (85%) followed by African-American (6%); Asian Pacific Islanders (3%); Hispanic (2%); Chicano-Mexican American (2%); Other (2%) and Native American (1%). For analytical purposes, we combined all minority respondents in a "students of color" category. Thus, in this report we will report on differences between white/Caucasian (85%) students and students of color (16%).

- **Education:** Most of the students in our study had a bachelor's degree (77%). About 16% indicated they have a master's degree, and the remaining 7% have a high school degree, an associate's degree, or a doctorate. Of those students with a bachelor's degree, most had degrees in arts and letters/liberal education (26%), social sciences (20%), government/public administration (15%), or communication (11%).

- **Employment:** Nearly all students (95%) were employed prior to enrolling in their academic program and most of these students had been employed full-time (92%). Most students had been employed in nonprofit organizations (60%), 15% had been employed in government and another 15% in for-profit organizations, and 5% had been graduate assistants. *While enrolled in classes or academic programs, most students continue to work (88%).* These students were primarily working in nonprofit organizations (55%) with 13% employed in a government agency, 13% employed as graduate assistants, and only 6% employed by a for-profit organization. *Of employed students, 78% were working full-time.*

- **Program Characteristics:** Most of our respondents (76%) were enrolled in master's degree programs. About a third of the respondents (34%) were enrolled in a master's of nonprofit management/philanthropy, 42% in master's programs with a nonprofit concentration, and 24% were participating in a certificate program. Nearly a third (29%) of the students had started their program in the past two terms. An equal number (29%) were about halfway through their program and 42% planned to complete their program in one or two more terms.

Perhaps the characteristic that distinguishes this group of students is that they were *working* students – most were employed full-time and most were employed in the nonprofit sector. The students represented a wide range of educational backgrounds – most had bachelor degrees but these degrees were from a variety of disciplines and colleges. The students as a collective, perhaps more so than the academic programs, can be thought of as "interdisciplinary."

Our sample was somewhat racially diverse (16% are students of color), mostly female (80%), and varied in age. Data from the 1990 census (Independent Sector, 1993) shows nonprofit employment to be two thirds female/one third male and 15.2% minority. If these demographic patterns hold over the decade of the

1990s, our respondents reflected the diversity of the sector, but not its gender profile.

In general, students enrolled in certificate programs tended to be older and students in the master's programs tended to be younger, though not to any level of statistical significance. Thus, we were likely to find older students enrolled in master's programs and younger students in certificate programs. The same holds for sex and ethnicity/race.

Continuing Education Decision Making

Decisions by individuals to undertake further education are complex. Students may be motivated to further their education based on monetary or psychic rewards. And they may consider many programs or just one. Moreover, they may be limited or restricted to considering programs within a certain geographic area or that offer evening or weekend courses. This section of our report focuses on the variables that influence students' – that is, non-profit management graduate and certificate students – decisions to continue their education.

Human capital. Models commonly used to explain individual choices for education are based on the economic concept of human capital. Human capital theory, narrowly defined, relates to "...activities that influence future monetary and psychic income by increasing the resources in people" (Becker, 1964: 1). The decision to enroll in a professional program is an investment in education *today* that is expected to produce returns *tomorrow* (i.e., throughout one's working life). The cost or investment in additional training takes the form of tuition and books, as well as foregone earnings, loss of time, and the psychic challenge of returning to school and contemplating career and employment changes. Changes in any of these factors will affect the cost and benefits associated with additional education. For example, the cost of training is reduced when employers assist with tuition, thereby encouraging more education, while mid-career workers may undertake less education since they have a shorter working life remaining to recoup education expenses.

The conventional approach to human capital portrays the individual as making a set of rational decisions, typically focused on *economic* outcomes, about current investments in education, job search, and training that will provide a positive return through income earned in later years. While this narrow perspective is certainly relevant to many decisions made about graduate management education, it is also important to incorporate the broader context of the nonprofit sector. Becker's original definition of human capital also referred to psychic income or *personal* factors that may be an important element in continuing

education decisions. In particular, there is a well-established norm that certain types of personalities or persons are drawn to work in the nonprofit sector (see Young, 1983 for a discussion on this topic). Focus groups of alumni from nonprofit management programs suggest that students know in advance that they could make more money in the for-profit sector yet they still choose to work in the nonprofit sector (Mirabella and Wish, 2000).

Guided by human capital theory in its broader definition, we constructed a set of questions to measure why nonprofit management students enrolled in graduate or certificate programs chose to return to school. We asked students to indicate how important (1=very important, 5=not very important) seven factors were in shaping their decision to continue their education. In Table 1 we rank in order these factors by their mean ($\bar{x}$) scores (the lower the mean, the more important the factor) and the percentage of respondents saying the factor was important (1 or 2) or not important (4 or 5) in their decision to return to school.

Table 1. Factors Influencing Decision to Continue Education

Factors	Mean	Important	Not Important
Personal Development	1.3	97%	1%
Skill Acquisition	1.5	90%	4%
New employment opportunities	1.8	83%	8%
Increase income	2.7	51%	27%
Career Change	2.8	47%	32%
Promotion with current employer	3.8	23%	63%
Suggested by employer	4.3	11%	80%

Results suggested that, overall, students rate personal factors as more important than economic factors in influencing their decision to continue their education. Personal factors such as personal development ($\bar{x}$=1.3) and skill acquisition ($\bar{x}$=1.5) were rated as the most important factors shaping student decisions. Following closely was the desire for new employment opportunities ($\bar{x}$=1.8). This factor likely captures both personal need for change and opportunity and some economic elements. In general, respondents' written comments corroborate the finding that they were motivated by personal factors. Students said they were pursuing their educational program to develop the "skills and knowledge to do my job well," for a "desire to learn theory after years of practice," out of a "general desire at mid career to 're-engage' academically," to "put sound theoretical and research background together with pragmatic skills," and because they "need new skills and ideas and enthusiasm."

While not as important as personal factors, about half of the students indicated that an increase in incomes was important ($\bar{x}$=2.7). Current employers had little sway in influencing students' decisions to return to school ($\bar{x}$=4.3).

In addition to examining the motivation for returning to school, we explored employer support of the continuing education decision, the length of time students took to make this decision, and the geographic areas they considered.

Employer support. As discussed earlier, most students were employed full- or part-time and most indicated that employers' suggestions had relatively little impact on their decision to continue their education. In fact, less than one-third (31%) said their employer suggested or encouraged them to join the program. Once enrolled, however, employers were at least somewhat supportive. Half (50%) of employed students said their employer provided some type of financial support and 44% of the students said their employer provided time-off for their education. Just 4% of employed students said their current employer was not supportive.

Length of time and number of programs considered. The decision to return to school was often made over several years. When we asked respondents how long they had considered a return to school, over one-third, 36%, considered it for less than a year, 24% for a year, 20% for two years, 13% for three-five years, and 7% for longer than five years. Almost half of the students, 49%, considered 2-3 programs and a similar percentage, 45%, considered only one program.

Geographic proximity. Students were asked about the geographic areas or locations that they considered for further study. Our respondents are essentially "place-bound" with most, 71%, seeking a program within a one-hour's drive. Less than one-fifth (19%) considered a program outside their geographic region. Moving to a new location can greatly increase the financial and psychic cost of education, involving moving expenses, seeking new employment, and adjusting to a new community. The importance of local access is not surprising given that many students are working and have careers, thus, they would face high costs by moving to enroll in a program at another location. Distance learning programs are an alternative to students who are geographically bounded but only 13% of the students indicated they had considered such programs.

Our findings reinforce the normative understanding that those employed in the nonprofit sector are likely to be motivated by personal benefits more so than financial rewards, although these two factors can be closely related. We need to bear in mind that for some of these students, employers subsidized their participation through time off or financial support. These employment benefits lowered the cost of education and made it financially possible for workers to seek additional training. Without this important subsidy by the employing organizations, the level of nonprofit management training sought could well be lower. Our findings suggest that nonprofit management programs are often sought as a complement to employment, and that students are constrained to finding programs in their location, rather than seeking out the location that provides the best program for their needs.

Choosing a Graduate Nonprofit Management Program

We have just discussed why students chose to continue their education and found a blend of personal, economic, and geographic forces that influence decision-making. This section of our report focuses on why these students chose to enroll in their current program. From the human capital approach and nonprofit employment literature, we identified 18 factors associated with selecting a graduate degree or certificate program and asked students to indicate how important (1=very important, 5=not very important) each was in selecting their current certificate or graduate program. A factor analysis of these items identified five categories of factors that we have labeled: reputation, nonprofit and community focus, costs, accessibility, and admissions. Table 2 lists groups of factors along with their mean ($\bar{x}$) and the percentage of respondents indicating this factor was important or not important in influencing their choice of a program.

Table 2. Factors Influencing Student Program Choice

Factors	Mean	Important	Not-Important
Reputation			
Reputation of program	1.9	80%	7%
Reputation of university	2.2	64%	11%
Teaching reputation of faculty	2.4	57%	11%
Quality of faculty research	3.2	28%	35%
Program placement record	3.3	26%	45%
Nonprofit/Community Engagement			
Specialization in nonprofits	1.9	74%	10%
Program's – practitioner engagement	2.2	66%	13%
Program-community engagement	2.4	58%	16%
Colleague's opinion of program	2.9	44%	28%
Admissions			
Academic requirements	2.8	41%	25%
Work experience requirements	3.3	24%	39%
Enrolment deadline	3.9	12%	66%
Costs			
Cost of tuition/classes	2.6	51%	22%
Financial assistance	2.8	48%	35%
Availability of assistantships	3.9	18%	66%
Accessibility			
Proximity of classes to work/home	2.4	63%	22%
Evening/weekend classes	2.3	63%	25%

What influenced students' choices of academic program? The reputation of the program ($\bar{x}$=1.9/80% important) and the program's specialization in nonprofit management ($\bar{x}$=1.9/74% important) were the factors rated most important by respondents. Also important was the reputation of the university ($\bar{x}$=2.2/64% important), the program's engagement with practitioners ($\bar{x}$=2.2/ 66% important), the availability of evening/weekend classes ($\bar{x}$=2.3/63% important), the teaching reputation of the faculty ($\bar{x}$=2.4/57% important), the program's engagement with the community ($\bar{x}$=2.4/58% important), and the proximity of classes to work/home ($\bar{x}$=2.4/63% important). Factors that appeared to have less influence on students' choice of programs include the quality of faculty research ($\bar{x}$=3.2/28% important), the program's placement record ($\bar{x}$=3.3/26% important), enrollment deadline ($\bar{x}$=3.9/12% important), work experience requirements ($\bar{x}$=3.3/24% important), and availability of assistantships ($\bar{x}$=3.9/18% important).

Findings suggest that students chose a program based on the program's focus (nonprofit management) and because of the program's positive reputation. Students were also attracted to the program's bridges with the community and practitioners. Accessibility – in terms of distance and time – was also an important factor. Of less importance were admission factors and financial considerations.

Further analysis of our data by student characteristics yielded several modest yet significant differences among students. First, students with previous work experience in the nonprofit sector were more likely to rate as important the specialization in nonprofits as a factor influencing their decision than were other students. Second, younger students were more likely to indicate that assistantships and financial assistance were important -- a finding compatible with a tendency for younger students to be more motivated by increases in income than older students when making a decision to continue their education. Finally, we found several significant, though modest, differences between students based on the type of program in which they were enrolled. While the reputation of the college or university and the program were important factors for all students, they were more important to students enrolled in Master's of Nonprofit/Philanthropy degrees. Proximity, evening and weekend courses, and costs were more important factors for certificate students than other students. Again, not a surprising finding given that certificate students tend to be older and therefore likely to have family and other extracurricular responsibilities.

Desired Course Content

Central to the BBI cluster evaluation is assessing the extent to which nonprofit courses reflect the interests and needs of the student/practitioner. Utilizing the research of Mirabella and Wish (internal/external) and the *Guidelines* by NACC and NASPAA (unique/general) as a guide, we developed a comprehensive listing of course topics and asked students to first evaluate the importance of each topic for managing or leading a nonprofit organization, and second, to indicate if each topic should receive more, the same, or less emphasis in their program.

The determination of which nonprofit management topics a program covers rests primarily with faculty members who design courses and curricula, but content can be influenced by student demand. It is important to note that students and faculty may have different assessments of what courses should and should not be taught, or the extent of emphasis on any one subject matter. The contribution of the survey is that it provides insight into what students value and want.

Table 3 presents student ratings of the importance of topics commonly covered in nonprofit management programs. On the rating scale, "1" is considered very important and "5" is not important. Thus, the lower the mean score ($\bar{x}$), the more important students perceive the topic. This table also includes the percentage of students indicating that they want more, the same, or less emphasis on the topic in their program.

Fundraising and development ($\bar{x}$=1.4) and strategic planning for nonprofits ($\bar{x}$=1.4) were rated as the topics most important for managing and leading a nonprofit organization. Other important topics included governance ($\bar{x}$=1.5), budgeting and accounting ($\bar{x}$=1.5), legal structure ($\bar{x}$=1.6), ethics and values ($\bar{x}$=1.7), evaluation and accountability ($\bar{x}$=1.8), proposal writing ($\bar{x}$=1.8), policy making ($\bar{x}$=1.9) and marketing ($\bar{x}$=1.9). Topics seen as less important include: international organizations and issues ($\bar{x}$=2.8), quantitative analysis ($\bar{x}$=2.5), history of the nonprofit sector ($\bar{x}$=2.4), and economics and market issues ($\bar{x}$=2.3).

Course topics that rated highest in importance were also likely to be those that students wanted emphasized more in their program. Over one-third of the students wanted more emphasis on strategic planning for nonprofits, fundraising and development, legal structure, governance, proposal writing, diversity, budgeting and accounting, policy making and advocacy. In particular, we found that certificate students were significantly more likely to want more emphasis on management information systems, economics, and marketing than were other students.

Table 3. Assessment of Nonprofit Management Courses

Course	Mean	Emphasis:		
		More	Same	Less
Strategic planning for nonprofits	1.4	44%	56%	1%
Fundraising and development	1.4	43%	52%	5%
Governance (e.g., board responsibilities)	1.5	39%	59%	3%
Budgeting and accounting	1.5	38%	60%	2%
Legal structure (e.g., incorporation, tax law)	1.6	40%	57%	3%
Ethics and values in philanthropy	1.7	22%	74%	3%
Evaluation and accountability	1.8	42%	56%	1%
Proposal writing	1.8	39%	58%	3%
Policy making processes	1.9	38%	59%	4%
Marketing	1.9	34%	62%	4%
Volunteer Management	2.0	32%	60%	8%
Human resources	2.0	24%	72%	4%
Advocacy in public policy	2.1	38%	56%	7%
Organizational theory and behavior	2.2	19%	67%	14%
Government-Nonprofit relations	2.2	25%	67%	8%
Diversity (culture, ethnicity) issues	2.2	39%	54%	7%
Information Systems for nonprofits	2.3	35%	58%	7%
Economic and market issues	2.3	24%	69%	8%
History of the nonprofit sector	2.4	7%	74%	19%
Quantitative analysis	2.5	19%	70%	11%
International organizations and issues	2.8	25%	63%	13%

What do our findings add to the work of Mirabella and Wish and the NACC and NASPAA *Guidelines*? To answer this question we constructed Table 4 using the internal/external distinction identified by Mirabella and Wish and the unique/general distinctions presented by NACC/NASPAA. Next, we placed each topic listed in our survey in one of the four quadrants: internal/unique, external/unique, internal/general and external/general. We then **bolded** those topics students rated as being most important ($\bar{x} \leq 2.0$) for managing and leading a nonprofit organization and checked (✓) the topics where one-third or more of the students indicated they wanted more emphasis.

Table 4. Classification of Nonprofit Courses

	Internal Organization Focus	External Organization Focus
Unique	• **Strategic planning for nonprofits ✓** • **Fundraising and development ✓** • **Governance ✓** • **Legal structure ✓** • **Ethics and values in philanthropy** • **Proposal writing ✓** • **Volunteer Management** • Information Systems for nonprofits ✓	• Government-Nonprofit relations • History of nonprofit sector • International organizations and issues
General	• **Budgeting and accounting ✓** • **Evaluation and accountability ✓** • **Marketing** • **Human resources** • Organizational theory • Quantitative analysis	• **Policy making processes ✓** • Advocacy in public policy ✓ • Diversity issues ✓ • Economic and market issues

Using this visual heuristic one can quickly see that topics that are unique to the sector and that have an internal organization focus were regarded by respondents as those most important to leading and managing nonprofits and also the topics that should receive greater emphasis. And, those courses unique to the sector but with an external organization focus appear less important to the respondents. Our interpretation of this data is, that while faculty and researchers, and perhaps those in leadership roles in regional or national nonprofit organizations, see a need for an external organization focus, our respondents are living in a "local" world and are seeking practical and immediately useful skills they can use within their organizations.

We also asked students if they perceived differences among the sectors regarding operating environments and leadership needs. Our findings are a bit surprising. On the one hand, most students (72%) agreed that the legal, economic, and social environments for nonprofits are significantly different from private business or government. On the other hand, however, just half of the students (50%) agreed that the leadership skills required for the nonprofit sector are different from those required by the for-profit or public sectors. Students see the nonprofit sector as different to other sectors, yet find greater overlap in the skills needed to manage in the sector.

Educational Satisfaction

How satisfied were students with their academic experience? To assess satisfaction, we listed a series of experiences associated with academic programs and asked students how satisfied they were with each element. These academic experiences fit into two broad categories: linking or bridge features and traditional academic characteristics. The linking or bridge features emphasize the connection of research or theory to practice. These are the features that the BBI would likely want programs to emphasize. The traditional academic experiences could be found in almost any certificate or degree program and would not be unique to BBI affiliates. Table 4 presents our findings on this topic. We used a 5-point scale ranging from very satisfied (1) to very dissatisfied (5). Thus, the lower the mean ($\bar{x}$) for any single item, the more satisfied students are with that element. We have also included the percent of students who were satisfied (1 or 2) and not satisfied (4 or 5) with each element of their educational experience.

Table 5. Student Satisfaction with Management Programs

Factors	Mean	Satisfied	Dissatisfied
Linkages/Bridges Experiences			
Connection of coursework to practice	2.1	67%	8%
Involving practitioners in the program	2.3	60%	16%
Collaboration opportunities for nonprofit leaders and students	2.5	56%	15%
Networking opportunities for students and alumni	2.5	53%	17%
Links between the program and nonprofit organizations.	2.5	54%	15%
Connection of research to practice	2.6	46%	13%
Placement services for students and alumni	2.8	36%	22%
Traditional Experiences			
Currency of course content	1.9	80%	4%
Instructional quality	2.1	70%	5%
Relationships with other students	2.1	68%	6%
Scheduling of class times	2.1	71%	14%
Relationships with faculty	2.2	67%	6%
Academic rigor of the program	2.3	61%	13%
Quality of research experiences	2.6	42%	12%
Faculty mentoring of students	2.7	42%	18%
Overall Satisfaction with Program	2.0	76%	5%

Students indicated that, overall, they were satisfied with their programs ($\bar{x}$=2.0) with half of the students saying they were satisfied and one-quarter saying they were very satisfied. Only 5% indicated they were dissatisfied with the program overall.

Students assessed eight factors associated with the linkages between the academic program and the world of practice. Each of these linking factors was rated lower than the students' overall satisfaction with the program. The linking factors perceived as most favorable were the connection of courses to practice ($\bar{x}$=2.1/67% satisfied) and the involvement of practitioners in the program ($\bar{x}$=2.3/60% satisfied). Students seem less satisfied, though still not dissatisfied, with collaboration opportunities for nonprofit leaders and students ($\bar{x}$=2.5/56% satisfied), networking opportunities for students and alumni ($\bar{x}$=2.5/53% satisfied), and links between the program and nonprofit organizations ($\bar{x}$=2.5/54% satisfied). Less than half of the respondents (46%) were satisfied with the connection of research to practice ($\bar{x}$=2.6). Students also indicated a low satisfaction with placement services ($\bar{x}$=2.8/36% satisfied), but it may be that they have not yet used these services.

It appears that students were, overall, somewhat more satisfied with the traditional academic characteristics of the program than they were with the linkage dimension. Students were most satisfied by the currency of course content ($\bar{x}$=1.9/80% satisfied), instructional quality ($\bar{x}$=2.1/70% satisfied), their relationships with other students ($\bar{x}$=2.1/68% satisfied), the scheduling of class time ($\bar{x}$=2.1/71% satisfied), relationships with faculty ($\bar{x}$=2.2/67% satisfied), and the academic rigor of the program ($\bar{x}$=2.3/61% satisfied). Students were less satisfied with faculty mentoring ($\bar{x}$=2.7/ 42%), followed by quality of research experience ($\bar{x}$=2.6/42% satisfied).

When choosing a nonprofit management program, students indicated that they valued programs that linked to the community, either directly or through courses or research. While an important reason to be attracted to a program, student responses suggest that this element, the bridge to the community, is less satisfying than the traditional elements of their programs. The linking/bridges experiences are a recent and less conventional form of education. It may be that faculty and nonprofit professionals are still uncomfortable or unsure of how to operationalize these linkages. It is also possible that these linkages are less valued by the academic institutions and thus receive less attention than the more familiar and valued traditional experiences. It is also possible that students are unfamiliar with these linkages and how to rate or value them. Regardless of the possible explanation, it seems clear that students value these community linkages as an important dimension of their education and that academic programs should focus more time and attention on making more or improving the quality of these linkages.

Conclusion

This survey of graduate nonprofit management students enrolled in BBI funded programs is the first of a two-part profile of the next generation of nonprofit managers and leaders. The second part is a follow-up of these students as alumni. This study presents a "demand side" perspective to complement our greater understanding of the supply side of nonprofit management education. The nonprofit management student population revealed by the survey is primarily female and white, but they come from a range of ages. The human capital framework allows us to structure our analysis in terms of the investments made by students to achieve further education. Accordingly, we found that students seek to continue their education primarily for personal development and skill enhancement, although they do consider the financial benefits too. Locality is also important – most students are working and studying at the same time. We believe that most students are seeking a program with a strong reputation and a focus on the nonprofit sector that is accessible in terms of location and class times.

Students are primarily interested in topics that focus on the internal and unique operations of nonprofit organizations. Perhaps this is because so many of these students are grounded in the day-to-day operations of a nonprofit organization and they need and want immediately applicable skills and knowledge. Differences do emerge among the respondents regarding the importance of courses and factors that influence their choice of program or decision to return to school, but few of these differences are statistically or substantively significant. The lack of differences is, in some ways, a surprising finding. We thought we would find differences by age, gender and race/ethnicity, but we found very few differences and most of those were negligible. And we certainly anticipated finding differences between students enrolled in certificate program, nonprofit management master's, and master's with a nonprofit concentration. Again, we found few differences. Students – regardless of their age, gender, race/ethnicity, and program type – share similar reasons for choosing to continue their education and to enroll in a program with a nonprofit focus; that these students tend to value the same types of courses or foci in a program; and that all students tend to value the bridging elements (the connection of research to practice).

Our study suggests that the current focus of nonprofit programs on internal issues (see Wish and Mirabella, 1998a, 1998b; Mirabella and Wish, 2000) is not misplaced – students seek topics that are focused on the internal and unique characteristics of nonprofit organizations. Of course, what students want or say they need may be shortsighted. For example, quantitative analysis may not be

fun, but it may be a necessary skill to be an effective user of research or evaluation and interpreting national or local trends and statistics. Our message to faculty and others who regard an external focus as important is to make these topics relevant and applicable to the life of a nonprofit professional who is handling daily operations of local nonprofits.

As stated earlier in this paper, our respondents were enrolled in six nonprofit management graduate and certificate programs affiliated with Building Bridges Initiative grantee institutions. Thus, we will not generalize to the larger population of other nonprofit management graduate and certificate students. Furthermore, without a comparison group we cannot say if these students and their programs are different from non-BBI affiliated institutions. These are questions for another study.

The second part of this study will begin in Summer 2001 and be completed in Winter 2001. We plan to see if students' preferences change over time and what type of impacts their educational experiences have on their work and their life.

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